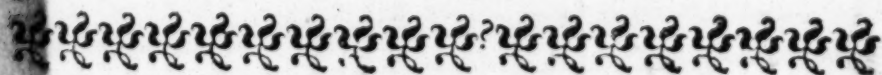


Mr. B L I S S's
S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D at

P O R T S M O U T H,

January XXX. 1725.



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MR. B. A. 22

SEP 11 ON



PORTSMOUTH

January XX. 1725

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S E R M O N
PREACH'D in the
P A R I S H - C H U R C H
O F
P O R T S M O U T H,
O N
SATURDAY *January* X X X.
1 7 2 5.

By *ANTHONY BLISS*, A. M.
Vicar of the said Church.

L O N D O N:

Printed for GEORGE EVERDEN, at
the *Bible and Crown* in *Portsmouth*, and
sold by J. CLARK and R. HETT in the
Poultry, London, M.DCC.XXV.

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH-CHURCH



SATURDAY

1725

BY THE HONOURABLE BLESS A.M.

Minister of the said Church.

L O W D O N

Printed for George Eversham, at
the New and Green in Pater-noster, and
sold by J. Clark and R. Hart in the
Poetry, London, M.DCCXXV.

To the Right Worshipful the

MAYOR

AND THE

ALDERMEN

Of the BOROUGH of

PORTSMOUTH

IN THE

County of *Southampton,*

THIS

SERMON

Preach'd before them, and Publish'd at
their Request, is humbly dedicated

BY

Their Obliged and

Most obedient Servant,

ANTHONY BLISS.

To the Right Worshipful the

MAYOR

ALDERMEN

PORTSMOUTH

County of Hampshire

SERMON

Preached before the Corporation of the
their Request, in the Church of St. Andrew

at the Office of the

the Reverend Mr. [Name]

Anthony [Name]



Z E C H A R I A H vii. 5.

Speak unto all the People of the Land, and the Priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the Fifth and the Seventh Month, even those Seventy Years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?



FASTING, though not expressly commanded in the New Testament, is yet recommended to us by several Instances there mentioned with Applause, and has also a good Foundation in the Reason of the Thing, as it has a natural Aptitude to bring

bring our Bodies under Subjection, to quicken our Devotion, and to make us more fit for all the spiritual Exercises of Religion.

BUT, as the best things are liable to be abus'd, and that to the worst Purposes, this excellent means of Religion has been frequently perverted into an Engine of worldly Policy.

OUR Saviour upbraids the *Jews* for their *formal* hypocritical Looks, their sad *disfigur'd* Countenances, and *affected* Shew of Mortification, *Matt. vi. 16.* And in the Text God upbraids them by his Prophet, for their appearing outwardly to fast, *when they did not fast unto him*, i. e. when they had no inward Contrition, no true Humiliation of Soul, and nothing answerable to the great Solemnity of their outward Pretences.

IN the following Discourse I shall

I. POINT out in general the more necessary Properties of a Religious Fast. And,

II. CON-

II. CONSIDER the Particular Occasion
of this Day's Solemnity, and the
Duties of it.

I. FIRST then I am to point out in general the more necessary Properties of a Religious Fast. If we consider Fasting only as an Abstinence from Meat, 'tis a Thing merely indifferent; and to invert the Words of the Apostle upon another Occasion, *Neither if we eat not, are we the better; neither if we eat, are we the worse*: So that there is something more requisite to give it the *Formality* of a Virtue, and to render it acceptable to God, *viz.*

First. A SOLEMN Humiliation of our Souls, a Confession of our Sins to God, and hearty Resolutions of Amendment.

Secondly. A DEPRECATION of his Displeasure, which we our selves have justly deserv'd, and an Intercession for others, that he would likewise avert his Judgments from them.

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First

First THEN, If we would keep a Religious Fast, we must humble our Souls before God: 'Tis not *enough to hang down our Heads like a Bulrush, or to spread Sackcloth and Ashes under us*; but a pious Frame and Disposition of Mind is absolutely necessary; Repentance is the constant Duty of a Christian, and our Saviour has taught us a daily Prayer for the Forgiveness of our Trespases: But 'tis Matter of particular Obligation, at the more solemn Seasons of publick Humiliation; when we are call'd upon not simply as *private* Christians, but as Members of a *Civil Society*, to contribute what we can towards diverting *National* Calamities, by lamenting each of us our *personal* Guilt; and when a general Reformation of the whole *Collective Body* is aim'd at and endeavour'd, by helping forwards the Reformation of each *particular Member*.

No one is so happy, as not to be conscious of numerous Miscarriages: Humane Nature is too far gone from its original Purity, and expos'd to too many
preva-

prevalent Temptations, to be thorowly innocent in any one Instance; and therefore as *all have sinn'd*, and so help to aggrandize the *National* Guilt, all are concern'd on publick Days of Humiliation, to humble themselves before God, and lament their Trespases.

THE Scriptures give us an account of several Days of publick Fasting religiously observ'd by the *Jews*, either for the averting some National Calamity, which they foresaw threatned them, or removing one that had already overtaken them: And even the *Ninivites*, tho' an Heathen People, humbled their Souls with Fasting at the Preaching of *Jonah*. So we read in his Prophecy, *Chap. iii. 4, 5. and following Verses: And Jonah began to enter into the City a Day's Journey, and he cry'd and said, Yet forty Days and Niniveh shall be overthrowen. So the People of Niniveh believed God, and proclaimed a Fast, and put on Sackcloth from the greatest of them, even unto the least of them: For word came unto the King of Niniveh, and he arose from his Throne,*

and he laid his Robe from him, and cover'd him with Sackcloth, and sat in Ashes: And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Niniveh (by the Decree of the King and his Nobles) saying, Let neither Man nor Beast, Herd nor Flock taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink Water; but let Man and Beast be covered with Sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil Way, and from the Violence, that is in their Hands; Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger that we perish not? And behold the salutary Effect, the happy Consequence of this Humiliation: And God saw their Works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the Evil that he had said, that he would do unto them, and he did it not; which leads me to the

Second PROPERTY of a Religious Fast, (viz.) A Deprecation of God's Displeasure, which we our selves have justly deserv'd, and an Intercession for others, that he would likewise avert his Judgments from them.

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WE see how it happened in the Case of the *Ninivites* ; their Humiliation procur'd them a Pardon, and upon their *ceasing to do evil*, he readily let go his Displeasure : And doubtless, the same Course in us would be attended with the same Success. He only threatens, that He may not strike, and hangs the Sword of Vengeance before our Eyes, on purpose that we may avoid its falling upon our Heads : Even in Judgment he remembers Mercy, and will not suffer his whole Displeasure to arise : Vengeance is his strange Work, and as he delights not in the Death of a Sinner, he waits long for our Reformation, gives us full Time for sober and better Thoughts, and with all the Tenderness of a Father is willing to be reconciled.

SUCH is his Goodness to us, sinful as we are, that he even courts our Addresses to himself, solicits our Applications, and invites us to ask his Favours : And though an impending Evil be ever so great, ever so near, or ever so

so much deserved, yet by a sincere Humiliation, by a Confession of our Guilt, and Vows of Amendment, we may seasonably divert the Stroke of angry Justice, and rescue our selves out of the Jaws of Death and the Pit of Destruction.

NAY farther, He not only regards our Petitions for *personal* Blessings upon our selves, but has also made it our Duty to intercede for others, and 'tis a pleasure to him, when we imitate his diffusive Goodness, and enlarge our Petitions for the whole Race of Mankind. The Holy Scriptures inform us, that *the Prayer of a Righteous Man availeth much*: And as 'tis common with Men, to comply with the Request of their Friends, so is God sometimes pleased to regard the Intercessions of those, whose Piety engages his Love, and to suspend his intended Vengeance upon others for their Sakes.

'Tis remarkable also, that the Prayer which our Lord left us, runs in the Plural

Plural Number, *Give us this Day our daily Bread, and forgive us our Debts, &c.* which shews, that we should not be selfish in our Devotions, or regardless of our Brethren, but that *Supplications, Prayers, and Intercessions, should be made for all Men.*

NOR can a good Man confine his Charity to himself; 'tis such a Violence to his Nature to do it: He must be concern'd in Pity for the Guilt of others, wish their Reformation, and Deliverance from the Evils that threaten them, and in Consequence of this, he must intercede for them. For what does Pity signify, if we proceed no farther? or Wishes avail, if not directed to God?

ADD to this, that our own Interest obliges us to this Practice: For tho' no one will finally perish for the Sins of others, and as to the Concerns of Eternity, every one must stand upon his own Bottom, yet temporal Rewards are not distributed with so nice a hand; nor does the Justice of God require
they

they should. And when he showers down his Judgments upon a sinful People, the few righteous must not expect to be screen'd by the peculiar Care of Heaven, but are frequently involv'd in the common Destruction: And therefore this should incline us to interpose with our Petitions, and to stop the destroying Angel, if we can, by our timely Intercessions, lest we should fall by his undistinguishing Hand, and be consum'd as dwelling in the neighbourhood of Sin.

THUS we find, that when the *Israelites* had provok'd God to Jealousy by their Idolatry, *Moses* presently interceded for them, and said, *Oh! this People have sinned a great Sin, and have made them Gods of Gold, yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their Sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy Book which thou hast written*, *Exod. xxxii. 31, 32.* And the Prophet *Jeremy* wishes that *his Head were Waters, and his Eyes a Fountain of Tears, that he might weep Day and Night for the slain of the Daughter of his People. Ch. ix. 1.* And God orders, *Ezech. iii. 4.*
That

that a Mark be set upon the Foreheads of the Men that sigh and that cry for all the Abominations that be done in the midst of Jerusalem. Which sufficiently proclaims, how acceptable this Practice is to him. And thus much for the first thing propos'd, which was to consider in general the more necessary Properties of a religious Fast.

II. I AM to consider the particular Occasion of this Day's Solemnity, and the Duties of it.

THE mournful Occasion of our present meeting is to lament the Murder of our late Sovereign; and that by his own Subjects, under all the *mock Formalities* of Law and Justice, a Murder which even the most *sanguine* will not dare to justify, and which some of the most *active Managers* at the beginning of the War, express'd the utmost Abhorrence and Detestation of; lamenting that their *well-meant* struggles for the *Liberties* of their Country should, by the *secret* Malice and Ambition of a *few*, so *unexpectedly* end in the Murder of their

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King,

King, and the Subversion of the Government.

AND what enhaunc'd the Evil of it, and made it of worse Consequence to the Nation, is, that it drove his *Royal Sons* from hence, to seek their Bread and their *Religion* too, in a foreign Country; where the the YOUNGER *especially* learn'd to conceive an Aversion to the *wholsome* Ties of a *limited* Monarchy, to break through the Obligation of *Solemn Oaths* and repeated Promises to abhor the very Name of a *Protestant*, and to *breath out Slaughter against all of that way*.

WHAT it was that rais'd the Spirit of Faction to so high a Pitch, is not my proper Business to enquire; only thus much may be said in general: 'Twas the Intermixture of *Civil Broils* with *Religious* Controversies, the Dread of *arbitrary Power* in the *State*, and of a *Papacy* in the *Church*, distinct indeed from that of *Rome*, but as malignant in its Consequences.

WHAT.

WHATEVER the Occasion of it was, 'tis but too well known how *Tragically* it ended: 'Twill be more proper in this Place to consider what Duties are requir'd of us, and what we are to do on this Day of Humiliation.

AND here 'tis certain, that there can be no room properly speaking, for our Repentance as to this particular Fact; we were no ways concern'd as *Agents* in it, and our Guilt can at most be only *hereditary*, and no ways *personal*; and in consequence of this we cannot deprecate the Vengeance of God upon our selves as *accessary* thereto.

NOR can we intercede for those, who were really guilty; for they have been all long since dead, and have receiv'd a Sentence from God, suitable to their Deservings, that is *irreversible*, and to pray for them now is downright *Popery*, and to assert a *Purgatory*.

IT may be ask'd then, Is neither of the Properties of a religious Fast requisite at this

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Season,

Season, and to what purpose is the Day observ'd? But 'tis easy to reply, the *Iniquities of the Fathers may be visited upon the Children*, and according to the *Jerwish Proverb*, where the *Fathers have eaten a sour Grape, the Children's Teeth may be set on edge*: If indeed succeeding Generations do not inherit the Crimes, they cannot inherit the Punishment of their guilty Ancestors, and the Justice of God is concerned, not to afflict innocent Posterities for their Forefathers Wickedness.

BUT can we shrowd our selves within the Verge of this Case? Can the present Age pretend a Reformation from the Crimes of the former? Or are Traytors, Rebels, and Regicides become obsolete, antiquated things, and *such as are not once named amongst us*? Alas! he must be strangely unacquainted with the Transactions of the present times, who can think that *Loyalty* is a prevailing Virtue, that our *happy* Establishment has not been struck at, and that there are not some, even amongst the *strictest Observers of this Day*, that impiously

piouſly wiſh, and are ready to endeavour,
I ſhould ſay, to *repeat* their Endeavours,
that his *preſent Majeſty* may come to as
tragical an end as the *Royal Martyr*; and
all this, though no Invaſion has been made
by him upon our *Rights and Liberties*,
and only to introduce a *Popiſh Pretender*
for the Security of our Church, a *Prote-*
ſtant Church.

AND as we tread in the criminal
Steps of our Forefathers, we have reaſon
to dread the *accumulated* Vengeance of
God, as well what is due for their Sins,
though hitherto ſuſpended in Hopes of our
Amendment, as what is due for our
own. 'Tis lamentable to conſider what a
Spirit of Faction and Sedition prevails
among us; What Feuds there are be-
tween thoſe of the ſame Religion, the
ſame Nation, and the ſame Church;
and how little of the Meekneſs of our
Saviour, and of that mutual Forbear-
ance, he ſo earneſtly inculcated, is to
be found among us: And as thoſe Divi-
ſions once involv'd us in Confuſion, we
may

may justly fear least the same Cause should produce the same Effect, or *some worse Evil should come unto us.*

LET us then contribute what we can towards the Suppression of all political Quarrels and Discontents; Love and a peaceable Temper are the distinguishing Mark of a Christian, and therefore more particularly his Duty. And as to this Day, how absurd is it, to make it a *Party Matter?* to widen our present Divisions, whilst we are lamenting the dismal Consequences of our former ones? And how inconsistent is it with the humble Spirit, necessary on so solemn a Day of Humiliation, to give a Loose to our Passions, *Anger, Wrath, Malice,* and virulently exclaim against and arraign our Neighbours, our *innocent* Neighbours.

IT has been often thought to bear hard upon the Justice of God, that he should threaten to *Visit the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children, unto the third and fourth Generation;* and 'tis necessary to understand the Menace with Restrictions,

to reconcile it therewith. And shall we then presumptuously charge the Royal Blood upon *Children* then *unborn*, and load *Innocent* Posterity with Invectives for their Fore-fathers Doings?

RATHER let us *study the Things that belong to our Peace*, and with *one Heart and one Mind* resist the Progress of growing Factions. 'Tis well known, who are most likely to gain by our Divisions, who at first fomented them, and whose *sportive Theme* they have ever since been; We trust their Hopes are all delusory, and that their destructive Schemes will prove abortive; But 'tis certain they are well laid, in as much as the *Protestant Interest* in general, the *Safety of the whole Reformation* depends upon our *present Establishment*, which can no ways so easily and compendiously be overthrown, as by our Divisions and intestine Quarrels.

MAY God unite our Hearts and our Affections; may he go on to deliver us
from

from all *Sedition, privy Conspiracy, and Rebellion*, from *Popery, arbitrary Power, and Oppression*; and may *Equity and Judgment* on the one Hand, and *Loyalty and a cheerful Obedience* on the other, be the *Stability of our Times*.



FINIS.



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